

Storytelling as a Technique for Promoting Listening Comprehension in a Fifth Grade

EFL class in a Public School in Dosquebradas, Risaralda

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### Abstract

This classroom project aims to implement storytelling as a teaching technique to report the impact on learners' listening comprehension. This project used American children's literature stories with fifth graders in a public school in Dosquebradas, Risaralda. During five weeks, in sessions of three hours per week, students were exposed to five different children's stories. Lessons followed a ESA (Engage, Study and Activate) teaching methodology that consist on three phases: First we engaged students with some key vocabulary or questions to allow students infer what will the story be about, then the storytelling took place and finally some worksheets were carried out to check comprehension. Children demonstrated comprehension of oral language input from the way they followed instructions, developed tasks and activities assigned.

## Resumen

Este proyecto de aula pretende implementar la técnica del storytelling para reportar sus efectos en la comprensión de escucha en los estudiantes. Este proyecto usó historias de la literatura americana para niños con estudiantes de quinto grado en una escuela pública en Dosquebradas, Risaralda. Por cinco semanas en sesiones de tres horas semanales, los estudiantes fueron expuestos a cinco diferentes historias para niños. Nuestra metodología consistió en tres fases, primero introducimos los estudiantes con algún vocabulario clave o haciéndoles preguntas para permitir a los estudiantes inferir de qué iba a tratar la historia que iban a escuchar, después la historia era contada y finalmente se les entregó hojas de trabajo para chequear su comprensión. En la mayoría de las tareas los estudiantes se mostraron muy interesados en escuchar las historias y se pudo evidenciar que los estudiantes mejoraron sus capacidades de escucha a través de un input comprensible y entretenido.

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## Introduction

Telling a story is a communication tradition used since early ages to transmit, preserve and shape societies. Each person is born with the innate ability to learn and share through stories, and this activity that is appealing to everybody is widely used as a communication tool. On children, it stimulates imagination, captivates their attention and promotes language learning. This project aims to describe the impact on children's listening comprehension by using American children's stories supported by means of pedagogical techniques such as the use of visual aids, body language, repetition of language chunks, etc. We expect to facilitate learner's comprehension, extract enjoyment and cultivate their interest towards English literature.

We introduced five different children's stories to fifth graders from the "*Institucion Educativa Eduardo Carranza*" located in Dosquebradas, Risaralda. During five weeks divided in two weekly of one and a half hour sessions we tried to arouse students' interests, motivation and curiosity with the implementation of ESA "*Engage, study and activate*" teaching methodology. On the engage stage, we elicited students previous knowledge and introduced new vocabulary drawing language listening to the story supported by visual aids, body language and lexical expressions. On the study stage they put into practice their skills to comprehend the story. Finally, on the activate stage, teachers assess listening comprehension by completing tasks and activities.

Tasks and activities focused on checking listening comprehension are developed on the active stage as collection methods to analyze students outcomes. Teacher can simply ask for a single word, sentence, phrase, gesture or body movement to demonstrate if students understood what they just heard. Teacher followed a formative assessment process to monitor and observe students' learning and provide feedback to them. By collecting this information about what happened in our classroom, and by analysing and evaluating it, we identify and describe emotions, reactions and events that occurred. We used diaries, journals, video recording and field notes that helped us to examine all the information collected and be aware of learning and teaching practices.

Pedagogical tools used by teachers, engaged students' attention and curiosity listening to the stories. Comprehension became simple when students felt relaxed and comfortable in a positive learning environment. They were engaged and confident participating in the tasks and activities planned in the lesson. Through gestures, actions, sounds and expressions, it was demonstrated students' comprehension and enjoyment. Students showed understanding of the story when they could follow instructions, answer comprehension questions, or say simple words or phrases. Listening comprehension seemed to work better when students were motivated and engaged. It allowed to extract students' delightful listening to stories and elicit real language in context.



## 2. Justification

Storytelling is the commonality of all human beings, in all places, in all times (Cooper, P. J., Collins, R., & Saxby, H. M. 1994). Through this natural and powerful tool of communication, children begin to realize the potential of the words they speak. At first, they have bits of stories in their heads, as they grow, they start to link these pieces to create more detailed stories. Machado (2015) states that storytelling adds new words to children's vocabulary and brings the opportunity to use them creatively. In addition, Neuburger (2012) agrees that storytelling helps children develop important language, communication and listening skills. Stories are full of language in context, repetition of chunks, lexical patterns, phonemes, and grammatical structures. Children ability to listen encourage them gradually to attach meaning of sounds and words. It gives them clues and understanding about the sounds combination and how sentences are formed. Browne (2009) says that as children become exposed to more and more language and are supported in their production, they become increasingly proficient in their language use.

Telling stories provide learners rich-language input that it is interactive and highly repetitive and patterned. Listening to stories can provide an ideal introduction to the foreign language as they present language in a repetitive and memorable context (Ellis & Brewster, 2002: 2). Stories become motivating, challenging and enjoyable they cater to children's interest and imagination and when they begin aware of rhythm, intonation and pronunciation. For this reason, storytelling is a potential vehicle for learning a foreign language simply because they are

fun, engaging and enriching. Krashen (1981) stated that comprehension occurs unconsciously and several affective variables are related to success in language acquisition. Waugh, Neaum, Waugh (2016) agrees that stories have the power to connect children with a new range of experiences and empathize with others emotions. When children enjoy listening to stories they become personally and emotionally connected to characters, settings and events. Consequently, the enjoyment that awakes story telling in children, makes the L2 language learning as natural as the L1 learning.

Stories are an ideal source for young learners in effective language learning since it enables them to learn more about themselves and the target language. This tool of communication is full of chunks, vocabulary, patterns, phonemes that facilitates language learning through comprehensible input which is key to maintain children attention and motivation. The language presented in stories encourage students to participate and use it in social situations. Hence, stories create an enjoyable learning environment that reduce children anxiety level and increases their confidence to use the target language. To sum up, storytelling is a significant tool to use in teaching as it presents students new language in a fun way that they find interesting and relatable to their realities and contexts.

### **3. Description of the study**

This project aimed to analyze the impact on fifth grader's listening comprehension using English children's literature stories in an elementary public institution. To achieve this aim, we used five different stories: "Are you my mother?", "The very hungry caterpillar", "Little bear", "Green eggs and ham", "Brown bear, Brown bear, what do you see?". The use of visual aids, body language, suprasegmental language and the repetition of words are useful aids for helping students to comprehend stories.

Apart from the spoken features involved in storytelling like intonation, repetition and stress, other aspects of stories were highly important to activate students listening comprehension such as TPR activities, visual aids and gestures. The stories were chosen taking into account the level of the learners so as to ensure comprehension and enjoyment and to reduce anxiety and frustration. Tests that students completed after the while listening part gave us to infer that they were engaged and motivated listening to the stories.

## **4. Objectives**

### **4.1 Learning objectives**

#### **4.1.1 General objective**

To facilitate, by means of pedagogical techniques such as the use of visual aids, body language, repetition of language chunks, etc. comprehension and enjoyment of children's stories in English.

#### **4.1.2 Specific objectives**

- To cultivate enjoyment of English children's literature.
- To extract enjoyment and general ideas from children's stories in English.

### **4.2 Teaching objectives**

#### **4.2.1 General objective**

Describe the impact on students' listening comprehension of storytelling as an English teaching technique.

#### **4.2.2 Specific objectives**

- To observe and describe students' attitudes during the development of storytelling.
- To use specific pedagogical techniques to facilitate children's comprehension of stories.
- To cultivate, in learners, enjoyment of English children's literature.

## **5. Theoretical framework**

### **5.1 Storytelling in English language classroom**

Mládková (2013) stated that storytelling is a traditional and powerful tool of communication between people that addresses language and emotions connected. What makes a story significant is the imaginative and emotional quality that it includes. Powers (1948) said that it is important to “make a story so alive that the audience reacts with like emotions, laughs, thrills and experiences the same heart-warming that you have felt in telling it”. The reactions that it brings over individuals makes a significant and enjoyable activity. As stated by Green (2004), stories have multiple functions in the classroom, including sparking student interest, aiding the flow of lectures, making material memorable, overcoming student resistance or anxiety, and building rapport between the instructor and the students, or among students themselves. For this reason, storytelling is an effective technique to apply in the language teaching classroom. As Wright (2003) states, it is not only a useful tool for first language acquisition but also for second language learning as learners will find it grammatically familiar through the repetition of words and phrases as well as it helps them to connect these patterns to their own experiences. Ashworth & Wakefield (2004) agrees that stories are full of language in context and when a story is told over and over again, vocabulary, structures and meanings become part of language repertoire. Storytelling has the essence to captivate young learners attention given the fact that they

unconsciously understand the principal message taking advantage of linguistic patterns involved in a story.

## **5.2 Implementation of children's stories**

Different types of literature can be targeted to different audiences, taking into account age, gender, experiences, etc. Children's books are the perfect type of texts. They are written at levels of complexity and interest that are perfect for a wide range of students (Wadham & Young 2015). In fact, integrating children's stories into English classes is an ideal technique for meeting diverse learning needs. Lea-Trowman (2017) affirms that experiencing and exploring stories with scaffolding will enable children to embed the learning of language and communication skills more effectively.

## **5.3 Using visual aids**

Handling visual aids in ESL classrooms reinforces the understanding of verbal and written English language. According to Li (2015) it helps students visualize information and convey ideas vividly, especially for learners who have difficulty understanding the concepts. Therefore visual aids support learning skills by enabling students to actively engage and comprehend isolated words. Geng, G., Smith, P., & Black, P. (2016) state that the use of visual aids in the classroom allows learners to more easily understand the spoken word. Rozakis, L., & Recorded Books, Inc. (1999) affirm that people process information through their eyes as well as their ears. For this reason, visual aids should be purposefully and carefully selected. Visual aids

help students to form accurate and clear concepts in English at the same time; they help teacher to avoid excessive verbalization. It also clarifies the objectives of the class which is positive for both teacher and learners, (Shankar 2010).

Considering these benefits, we can say that integrating visual aids into language learning scenarios contributes positively to children's comprehension. Supporting the learning process with visual aids attract students attention and heightens student's motivation and concentration (Ur 1984). At the same time these visual aids build an environment that reduces the dependence of students on their mother tongue creating meaningful and joyful comprehensible messages.

#### **5.4 The role of first-language proficiency in English vocabulary learning**

The children's first language can be used as a tool to help them to learn a foreign language (Ellis, G., & Brewster, J 2014). Switching to L1 to L2 is quite natural when a class shares a common language, so acquiring new vocabulary is easier when it is related with existing knowledge. Hence, Healy, A. F., & Bourne, L. E. (2013) describe various vocabulary acquisition techniques such as words that are phonologically similar between L1 and L2 and the importance of having a spoken model that the learner can recall from. The more comprehensible input they have, the less anxious they will be to participate in activities that required them to participate using L2. Additionally, Munoz (2006) points out other benefit of L1 when learners are younger than twelve years old because they acquire wider vocabulary, leading them to speak the second language more naturally.

### **5.5 Total physical response activities in pre production stage**

Learning the mother tongue is a natural process that already existed in human's brain (Chomsky 1928). Asher (2012) states that children learn their mother tongue with 'language-body conversations' when the parents instructs, the child responds physically. In the classroom teachers incorporate commands into language instruction while students respond by actions. This technique forms the basis of Total Physical Response Approach developed by James Asher. It consists of giving commands and having students act out what the teacher says. They often focus their entire attention on comprehending what is said. According to Frost (2004) the children grab the message, and unconsciously responds to it spontaneously. Krashen (1981) pointed out that learners attempt to produce language when it is provided in an input-rich natural environment and when they are ready to do it. Indeed, verbal or nonverbal responses are a sign of learners' comprehension.

In T.P.R. the teacher plays an active and direct role: the students are the actors and the facilitator is the director of a stage play. According to Larsen and Freeman (2000) "the teacher is the director of all students' behaviors". (p.113). The teacher's purpose is to decide what to teach, select the topics for the class, use and present the new materials. The main role of students in a T.P.R. context is to be listeners and performers. Students should give a physical



representation to verbal commands given by the teacher; students are encouraged to respond individually and collectively.

### **5.6 Learning language by “chunks”**

Teaching and requiring students to use chunks will increase their confidence since these little pieces of language make them feel they are in charge of the conversation that takes place (Brown & Yule 1983). Chunks are a useful tool for students to foster their fluency and provide authenticity of L2 use (Evers-Vermeul & Triushinina). Therefore, children learn a language in larger “lexical chunks” or meaningful strings of words. These strings first appear in the repertoire of the L1 or L2 learners as entities which are later discovered by them to contain subparts (Meunier, F., & Granger, S 2008). Cameron (2001) claims that younger learners actively try “to make sense” to find and construct a meaning. Children do not need to be told explicitly about language rules because they focus on meaning (Mckay 2006 ). Learners explore various aspects of language when they are exposed to unanalyzed chunks of language (Randall 2007).

Repetition, which is highly linked to chunks, presents students with a clear view of language forms and makes them aware of their own language production (Tinker-Sachs & Ho). Skehan (1998) explains that repetition is not viewed from the perspective of habit formation, rather it provides learners with greater access to language forms and opportunities to compare the

language produced by themselves. That is to say that repetition is an innate process of first language learning and similarly happens in second language acquisition when learners are exposed to contextualized lexical phrases. According to Raynaud (2009) perfection comes through repetition and young people can store a great quantity of information that later can be used in context. Krashen's (1983) input hypothesis claims that language is acquired from what we hear (or read) so early production emerges on its own, and usually when learners start to produce, their speech consists of simple words and short phrases.

Repetition is a big part of storytelling. Johnson (2009) asserts that repetition is often the most memorable part of the story and collections of children's books generally have repetitive sounds, phrases, and structures that help children to make predictions about what is coming next. "Goodnight moon" by Margaret Wise Brown is an example of children's books using repetition. This book is made of short two- and three- word sentences. She uses the same sentence structures with different vocabulary.

...In the great green room.

There was a telephone

And a red balloon

And a picture of

The cow jumping over the moon

And there were three little bears sitting on chairs

And two little kittens

And a pair of mittens

And a little toy house

And a young mouse...

### **5.7 The crucial role of Listening Comprehension**

Listening comprehension plays a central and a predominant part in the whole process of language learning (Krashen 1981). According to Barclay (2012) listening is the act of assigning meaning to what is heard, and it involves many different cognitive skills and processes. Cain, K., & Oakhill, J. (2008) claim that comprehension of spoken language requires competences at different levels: phonology, syntax, pragmatics and semantic. Harmer agrees (2011) that the more the students hear and understand English being spoken, the more they absorb appropriate pitch, intonation, stress, and sounds of words. Hence, the capacity to comprehend language involves several skills, and this process can be easier when learners are exposed to comprehensible input. According to Anderson & Lynch (1988) the input that learners receive should be understandable and lead to the learning of new language in such a way that the learners are able to make connections between the known and unknown concepts in the native and foreign language (Cecil, Joan, & Marcy 2017).

Krashen's well known theories focus on the importance of input in the process of language acquisition. As he states, language acquisition only takes place when the message

which is transmitted is understood. He highlights the central role of input and the importance of acquire languages via comprehensible input. Rost (2013) claimed that comprehension is considered to be the first-order goal of listening and, as learners are exposed to new information, they build a comprehension structure to relate it with the previous information. Hence, it is important to make input as comprehensible as possible to increase the chances of having all the student engaged on the activities we plan. Krashen's (1983) *input hypothesis* underscored the importance of the message what is being said rather than the form how is transmitted. Therefore whatever helps comprehension is significant in language acquisition process.

- The support of visual aids are useful in the foreign language instruction. When pictures and other visuals supply are integrated in the classroom practice it facilitates the learning and make it more efficient.
- Vocabulary should not be avoided: with more vocabulary, there will be more comprehension and there will be more acquisition.
- Children's understanding implies how the instructor provide comprehensible input. It concerns how the teacher uses certain structures and if the students understand the message. Input will be at the  $i+1$  level, where “i” is the learner's ability to understand and “+1” represents the new knowledge or language structures that learners should be ready to acquire.
- The classroom where the language acquisition takes place should be a learner-friendly space where learners feel comfortable and concern themselves with learning and not the environment surround them.

Comprehension, in a very significant way, plays an essential role in language acquisition. It is absolutely necessary to interpret general meaning without always understanding all the details. According to Maynard (2012) developing listening skills is vital to all areas of learning and when children are learning a second language, they are expanding their knowledge and understanding in an unconscious process.

## **6. Methodology**

### **6.1 Context and setting**

This classroom project was carried out with fifth graders from the “*Institucion Educativa Eduardo Carranza*” that belongs to the principal institution *Santa Isabel*. This school ran just morning schedule only from first to fifth grades. The staff who worked in the school was formed by five teachers, four of them are professionals in early education, and a psychologist with emphasis in education; they are in charge of the teaching of all the subjects including English though none of them are graduated from a language program. English is taught one hour per week through the program “Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Guia 22”. The resources used are called “Bunny Bonita” and the British Council English teaching materials, coming from The Colombian Ministry of education.

The school has seven rooms, five are classrooms, one is a computer room and the other one is the administrator room. It has a field for practicing sports mostly soccer and just one of the classrooms is equipped with one TV. There is also a kitchen of teacher-use only, and a small canteen for students to buy snacks. The population of this public institution are students belonging to a middle socioeconomic strata and few of them are registered in lower strata. Most of the school's population are children living in the neighboring area.

## **6.2 Participants**

**6.2.1 Students:** The participants of this classroom project were a group of thirty-four fifth graders, twenty-one girls and eleven boys, whose ages ranging between nine to twelve years old.

According to the National Bilingualism Program in Colombia, fifth graders are classified in A1 level. At this level students can interact in a simple way asking and answering questions about their personal information, also they can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs (CEFR, 2001). Based on student's ages, children increase their levels of attention, speed and efficiency in which they process information and build memories with long-term duration (Papalia, Wendkos & Duskin, 2010). Furthermore, they are in the process of literacy development, specifically defined by McLachlan & Arrow (2017) as the stage where children develop emergent literacy and are able to produce language concurrently and independently that is result of a social and cultural exposure.

### **6.3 Pre-service teachers role:**

The practitioners were two ninth semester pre-service teachers from English language teaching program at Universidad Tecnologica de Pereira. We both had roles as practitioners and observers. As practitioners we were in charge of the design of the listening comprehension lessons based on telling stories from children's' American literature; also choosing the materials and planning the activities to be taught. The stories were selected and adopted from the Common Core State Standards of America.

As observers we monitored and reported our participants' reactions. According to Schensul and LeCompte (2013) observers play an active role being involved in, presented at and recording the daily routines to gather data. Observers used different collection techniques as a way of gathering information which allowed us to reflect on their reactions.

### **6.4 Ethical considerations**

The study was titled "Storytelling as a foreign English teaching technique with fifth grade in Dosquebradas, Risaralda". It was focused on the influence that storytelling had over the students' listening comprehension. For the data collection, it involved journals, diaries, video records, the student's artifacts and photos from the lessons. The length of the project was ten sessions (approximately ten hours). In order to gather the data, students and parents were

informed about: the purpose of the project and how the data collection would be done. As part of an ethical approach to this study we obtained:

- The permission by the institution director to eject the project
- The permission by the parents and guardians of the students to allow them to participate in the project
- The permission to collect the data

The practitioner and the students were photographed as well as filmed when they talked and interacted during the activities.

## **6.5 Instructional design**

This classroom project aimed to describe fifth graders comprehension when they listened to English children's literature. The implementation of the lessons were guided by a forward design which means developing a curriculum through moving from input, to process and then to output (Richards, J. C. 2013). We used Engage, Study and Activate (ESA) teaching methodology proposed by Harmer. This model encourage learners to have opportunities to be involved and to practice the language taught (Harmer, 2007).

In the first stage, that is called engage, practitioners stimulated students' attention and curiosity through games, visual aids, videos, and questions. Pre-service teachers tried to recall prior knowledge and experiences to facilitate students' predictions of what they would be listening to.



In the second stage called study, practitioners told the story and made some pauses to ask students what would happen; students were able to mime or tell what they were expecting to happen in their mother tongue. When the storytelling took place, it was supported by pedagogical features as images, body language, intonation, etc.

In the last stage called activate, students completed a set of activities once the story was told. With this, practitioners checked comprehension using different techniques. One of them was making questions about the most significant moments in the story and students answered with verbal or nonverbal responses (thumbs up for yes and down for no).

## **6.6 Assessment stage**

For the assessment of this classroom project, we followed a formative assessment to monitor and observe students' listening comprehension process. This type of assessment is defined by Grover (2014) as the monitoring, diagnosing, and giving feedback that help students to improve their learning. Formative assessment is a process that occurs in teaching and learning and it involves both teachers and students. The role of teacher is monitor students learning observing their responses continually and reflecting on them to provide ongoing feedback. Cornett, C. E. (2017) claims that students are more likely to sustain motivation and meet goals when they receive guidance and constructive feedback.

The role of listening in a second language is to facilitate and help learners' abilities to understand spoken discourse (Richards, J. C. 2008). There are different tasks and activities teachers can use to check students comprehension, one of those is to involve students in activities where they can support their understanding with verbal or non-verbal language. Teachers provide formative feedback to keep track of learners' process. Moreover, according to Rathvon (2004) children show understanding at one or more levels including single words, phrases, sentences, and connected discourse.

Law, B., & Eckes, M. (2007) point out that students demonstrate listening comprehension if they are able to do specific tasks or follow instructions. The resources used to assess and check learners understanding were comprehensible questions either multiple choice or true/false questions. These resources are well suited for the assessment of general comprehension for making inferences, understanding hidden messages and summarizing the story.

## **6.7 Reflection stage**

To analyze and reflect on students' linguistic outcomes various data collection methods were used. Diaries and journals allowed us to collect data from students and from what we teachers observed. According to Allen (2017) it gives practitioners information about what the participants are inconsistent or frequent on an specific behavior or result. Worksheets gave us a general view of how the class was responding to the stories children were being told, and also to

observe their individual process. The field notes describe situations during the class and video recordings corroborate what happened in the classroom.

- Diary (See Appendix A) enables behaviour, feelings, and experience to be recorded close to the time that the event, situation or experience occurred (Offredy & Vickers 2010). This collection tool gives us an opportunity to reflect on our strengths and weaknesses towards the teaching experience. Furthermore, it is useful to show the sensitive nature of our experiences, emotions, expectations and outcomes.
- Journal (See Appendix B) aims to collect different types of information to analyze and reflect on specific phenomena. This aspect to observe is discussed before the observation takes place, directing our attention carefully and analytically on what we are looking at. The observation information are based on the field notes and the video recordings taken in the lessons. According to Ravitch & Carl (2015) journal entries provide an opportunity to engage in focused thinking about your perspective on concepts and experiences related to your research.
- Video recordings make the reflection valuable and precise since it involves the collection of naturally occurring events like conversations, behaviours and attitudes. When the video recordings are checked it provides different and new perspectives from the classroom directly. As a result, we obtain a deeper and more significant reflection corroborated with journals and field notes.

- Field notes (See Appendix C) is a personal observation that should reflect on the setting, students' attitudes, conversations, and events during the lessons. Gortman et al., 2005 suggests that when observers start to see a pattern that may be significant for the study, they must take note of it for feature reflection.

## **7. Data analysis**

The data analysis of this classroom project was based on the methodologies and procedures of grounded theory. According to Denzin & Lincoln, (1994) grounded theory is a constant process where the analyst becomes familiar with the data and develops concepts and models to show how the phenomenon studied really works. With the purpose of knowing the impact of storytelling on students' listening comprehension we used codes and themes to analyze and categorize the collected information. Thus, as first stage, a pre-coding stage was implemented. It arranges things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system of classification, to categorize (Saldana 2016). According to Layder (1998) to codify is by circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes or passages that strike you. This "ocular scan method" described by Bernard (2000) helps to separate and sort the information easier.

Once the data was categorized, we implemented a process coding using gerunds (-ing words) to represent a topic. Process coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that search for "ongoing action/interaction/emotion taken in response to situations, or problems, often with the purpose of reaching a goal or handling a problem" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 96-7). Indeed the data analysis had a variety of data forms (journals, observations, diaries, video-records, and students' artifacts), we named the main features regarding the impact of stories on listening comprehension and followed a specific relevant order focused on the data collected.

## **8. Findings**

### **8.1 Introducing vocabulary supported by visual aids**

#### **8.1.1 Flashcards**

When we introduced vocabulary with flashcards most of the students said the word in Spanish of what it represented to them. If students found the images familiar they did some facial expressions, comments, or exclamations. They also started to give opinions and talked about experiences they had had. We found that when students were able to relate to the images, they were excited and discussed these images among themselves.

From the use of flashcards in the classroom, we could see that most of the students gradually began utilizing the words in English instead of Spanish. Student's answers showed that they began to associate the images along with the spoken words since the majority of them mentioned the words correctly as we showed the flashcards. Furthermore, students were able to answer simple questions about what they saw on the flashcards using vocabulary they already knew. This seems to indicate that flashcards activated prior knowledge as it is evidenced in the following example

**(Sample 3)**

**Teacher showed a flashcard to the students and asked some questions.**

**T: Look what is this. What color is the pear?**

**SS: It is green**

**T: Now, take a look. How many pears are?**

**The whole group counted the pears..**

**Ss: One, two, three, four.**

**T: Excellent, the pear is green. There are four pears. What fruit is this?**

**Ss: A pear**

**T: Good, this is a pear. The pear is green. There are four pears.**

### 8.1.2 Realia

From the very first moment we began showing real objects to the students, they told us to let them manipulate/interact with the objects as they wanted to touch them. When students had the opportunity to grab the objects, they touched, smelled and observed them. For example in one lesson when we presented food vocabulary, some students smelled some fruits and vegetables saying “mm que rico” or “ugh que asco” to express their likes or dislikes. We found that student’s excitement in students’ voices varied according to the objects we showed them. This suggest to us that real objects could create a stronger connection between the objects we presented and their context.

Student’s responses during the activities in which realia was used showed that students associated the words with their meanings if they had interacted with the objects before. We inferred that real objects facilitated students learning and recalling the words easily. Nonetheless, in the case of words like “*cherry*” and “*peach*” that were not quite common in learners context, they asked us for descriptions and explanations of them. As a result, students did not recall these words easily. From the findings, we could infer that realia created a link between the target language and student’s context that resulted in a more effective learning.

## 8.2 Encouraging students to participate in activities

### **8.2.1 Games**

Right after telling students that we were going to carry out a game, most of them clapped their hands, raised their voices and jumped up in their seats. They showed us their desire to be part of the activities by raising their hands or pointing to themselves while yelling “me, me, me...” or “Profe, me deja ser el siguiente”. It was evidenced that the majority of students were interested in participating in the games.

In the games in which we had to split the group into two teams, we saw that students had various reactions depending to the results their team got. They smiled, laughed and celebrated if their classmates answered correctly, but if their team lost, they frowned, and corrected the partner, even rudely sometimes. We also noted that some students paid extra attention to the score only to brag to the members of the other team.

### **8.2.2 TPR activities**

The findings suggest that Total Physical Response approach (TPR) activities could cater to most students’ attention and interest. They received basic commands from us that they were usually willing to follow. Responding to commands, students performed whole body responses either moving or touching things around the classroom, jumping, clapping and stomping. One of the activities we found that students enjoyed the most was “Point out” activity. Most of students



identified the words when we said them aloud and they correctly pointed to the images. It can be stated that students made correct relations between what they heard and the images they saw.



*Figure 1. "Point out" activity consists on point to the images that the teacher says correspondingly. The images were stick around the classroom (wall, door, board, etc).*

We could see that the boys were more active and agile than girls in their participation in the TPR activities. Most of boys were competitive with their classmates. They always wanted to be the best or the first, and also they put all their energy into winning. On the other hand, we observed that most of girls were rather focused on following the instructions we gave them. We observed that students were smiling, laughing, moving their bodies and playing around. These responses indicated to us that students enjoyment and willingness to follow instructions were high when the TPR activities were carried out in the class.

The TPR activities required students to use gestures, facial expressions, body movements or actions to respond. “*Thumbs up-thumbs down*” activity for example consisted of saying students true or false statements about the story, and they had to put their thumbs up for true or thumbs down for false. Students kept their eyes wide open while we were making the statements, and their answers were mostly correct. Also some verbal expressions helped us to confirm their understanding.



*Figure 2. We checked student's comprehension asking questions about the story. Students use their thumbs to answer yes or no.*

### **8.3 Engaging children's emotions and thoughts**

While telling the stories we noticed that the whole group remained quiet and students kept looking at us most of the time. The turns in the story were highlighted with voice changes and body language in which students smiled, showed surprise, frowned, cried and laughed. It demonstrated that they were keeping track of the turning points in the stories. One example of this was seen with respect to the “Are you my mother?” story. Children faces expressed sadness about the bird not being able to find his mother; some of them had watery eyes and even some girls were about to cry.

Some students found the stories familiar since we heard they began giving opinions and commenting about the stories. In “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” some students said that they already knew the story since their parents used to tell it to them as “La Oruga muy Hambrienta”. Furthermore, most of students related the illustrations from “Green Eggs and Ham” with movies such as “The Lorax”, “The Cat in the Hat” and “How the Grinch Stole Christmas”. We heard students make comments about how fun the stories were and some students talked about the characters, settings and plots.

## **9. Discussion**

This action research is intended to describe the impact on students' listening comprehension using American children's stories. The findings found that the pedagogical techniques we used seemed to help students' understand spoken language. When we introduced vocabulary to the learners using visual aids, most of the time they did not ask further explanations of what the words meant. We inferred that the use of images and realia gave visual representations of words and in this way helped students relate to the meanings. During storytelling time students repeated words or pointed to the visual aids when they listened to them. Sometimes they talked among their classmates or did facial expressions related to their reactions to the use of words in stories. These responses could be explained by their capacity to identify words previously introduced to them and relate them with their experiences and background.

In games and TPR activities students participated actively and enthusiastically. They often asked us to play games and do activities that involved movements. It seems these activities built a positive learning environment that reduced their anxiety about participating, interacting and communicating with their classmates. We inferred from this that while students were engaged with these activities, they were prompted to use the language naturally just as they do with their mother tongue. Since TPR activities were modeled by us, students were able to follow instructions successfully. Indeed, during the activities they remembered the movements that corresponded to the commands. This demonstrated to us that learners understood and learnt words when they involved their bodies.

When listening to stories, students stayed quiet and looked at the teacher who was telling the story. Students smiled, cried, laughed and frowned reacting to different events in the stories. We inferred that storytellers have the power to generate and link students emotions with characters, events and settings. Furthermore, we noticed that most of students liked listening to the stories since they often asked us to tell the stories again after they were told and they talked with their classmates about some events from stories. It seems that when students are involved and enthusiastic listening to stories it enables them to comprehend.

### **9.1 Implications of our findings**

Our study suggests that listening activities should be supported by tools needed to facilitate learners comprehension of spoken language. Teachers should consider the use of colourful visual aids that learners can feel attracted to. Illustrations help teachers to introduce and teach new vocabulary. Moreover, teachers should implement engaging, interactive activities rich in language in order to encourage students to use English as much as possible in the classroom avoiding the use of L1.

The study supports the concept that when young learners are involved listening to stories, they become familiar with language phrases, lexical patterns and grammatical structures used in context. The rhythmic cues and repetition in American children's literature facilitates language

comprehension. Teachers must consider implementing stories that are appealing for learners since input is important to fostering students language production.

## **9.2 Limitations of the study**

One of the difficulties we had was that in our findings we could not determine students individual comprehension due to the number of students (thirty four fifth graders). Such a large group demanded from us extra attention so that we could not observe and analyze each student's responses. It was difficult to obtain detailed observations of how much they understood spoken language. Another important aspect that we did not take into account was that in our methodological instruments we did not include a tool to determine student's prior knowledge of English. Since we lacked this information, we could not have a clear starting point that would allow us to observe students' progress while the project was carried out.

## **9.3 Future research**

Further researchers intended to study storytelling should take into account the flexibility and adaptability that it allows for working with different levels and kinds of learners. Studies on storytelling should consider the number of participants in order to observe in more detail progress in listening comprehension. Another important aspect for further study would be

research into verbal production of students. Through stories learners are exposed to language in context, chunks and repetition.

## **10. Conclusion**

In this classroom project, we wanted to report the effects that using Storytelling technique had on fifth grade learners listening comprehension. To accomplish the goal, we used American children's literature using pedagogical tools such as body language and visual aids. Lessons were executed following the ESA teaching methodology. During the Engagement stage we introduced vocabulary or presented the topics using visual aids, games and TPR activities. During the Study stage, the story was presented. Finally, during the Active stage, students demonstrated comprehension of the story through tasks and activities in class.

The pedagogical techniques we used to tell stories were useful to facilitate students understanding. By the use of visual aids, we observed that learners gradually started to relate images with words in English and their meanings. We can infer that these pedagogical techniques provided visual and physical learning that created a positive environment to encourage student's attention and motivation. Games and TPR activities were seen to entertain learners. They actively participated in the activities and they asked us to continue doing them. Evidence showed that learners used the language as much as the activities demanded.

From these findings, we concluded that student's enjoyed listening to the stories they were told. Their facial expressions and comments demonstrated their engagement with and interest in the different events that occurred in the stories. From this, we can say that storytelling is a pleasant activity that motivates and engages learners to use language, as well as to connect their emotions and thoughts. Findings demonstrated that when students are comfortable with the learning environment, listening comprehension is improved and learners participate and complete the assessment tasks correctly.

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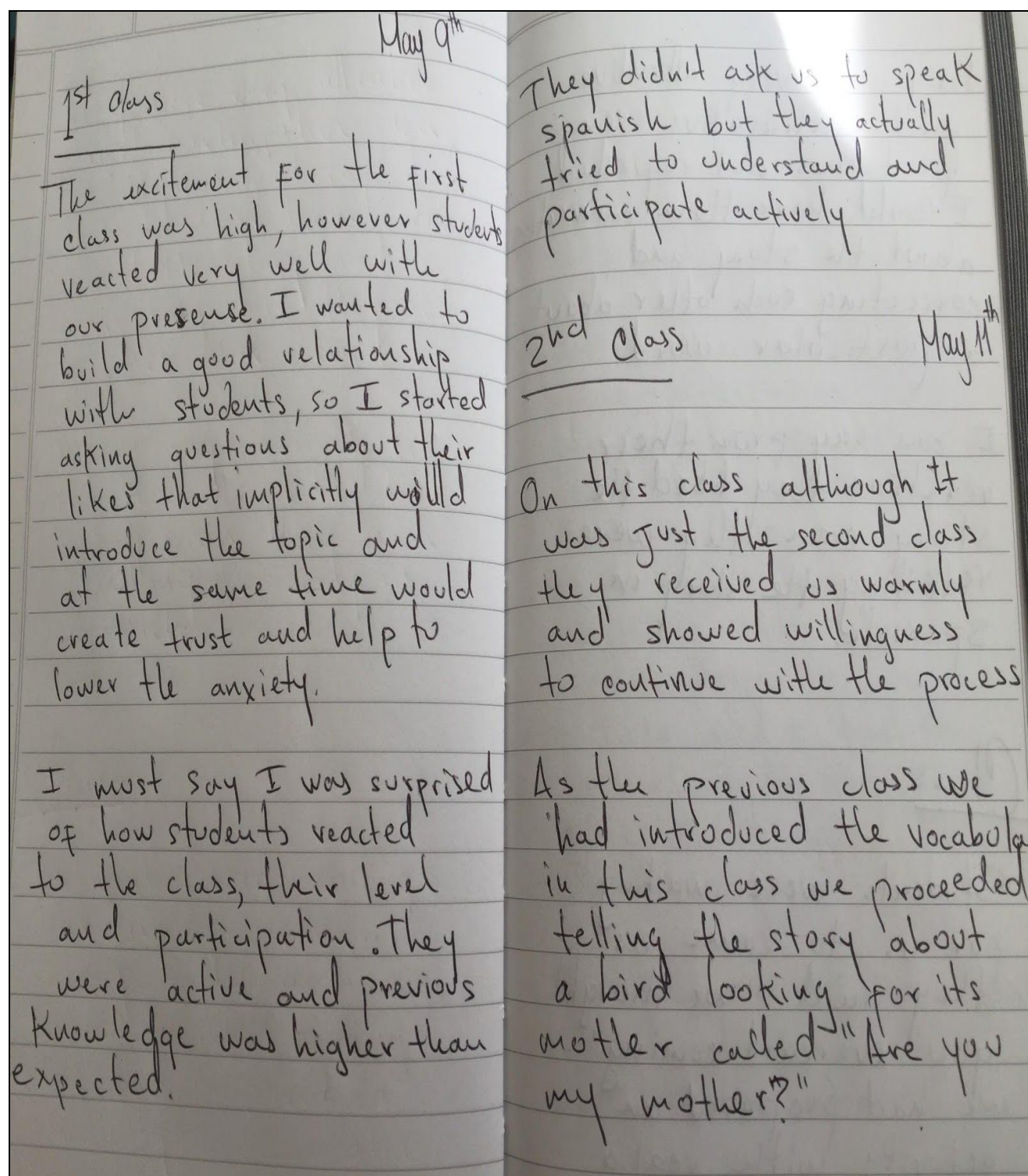
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## Appendix A





they were very attentive and participative even if it was not requested. I could hear them commenting about the story and correcting each other about a particular word.

I can say from their reaction they liked the story even they were retelling the story in Spanish.

7th Class

May 30<sup>th</sup>

Students were waiting for us to come as they said "we thought you weren't coming" we had prepared an activity with realia

so they were very curious about what were those things and asked us what we had planned.

During the activity they were participative and concentrated except for two students who were making these comments that didn't have to do anything with the class or the topic so my partner and I had to ask them to stop. This issue didn't affect the class though.

In general it was a good class and we learned about their interests.

## Appendix B

## Journals

## Observation format 1

STUDENTS RESPONSES TO NEW SPOKEN VOCABULARY	
STAGE	TOPIC
<p>ENGAGE</p> <p>INTRODUCING THE MAIN TOPIC OF THE STORY</p>	<p><i>Teachers asked students about their interests and likes, also they talked about what they hobbies are. During this stage the activity that involved commands was understood, the whole class could reply correctly to the teacher questions since it required to put their thumbs up or down, it is something they previous knew. Visual aids were highly important for students to convey the meaning.</i></p>
<p>STUDY</p> <p>WORKING ON THE NEW VOCABULARY INTRODUCED</p>	<p><i>During the task students showed they understood the meaning, all of the students were engaged and completing the worksheet they received, some of the students worked as</i></p>

	<i>a zone of proximal development for their classmates.</i>
ACTIVATE  USING THE LEARNED VOCABULARY	<i>As expected this activity was more challenging for students but most of them could complete it. Some of the students asked us about the meaning of words but we denied to answer and encouraged them to make an effort to remember them.</i>
<i>CONCLUSION:</i>  <i>New vocabulary activities are normally easy for students for this reason when they feel challenged they usually give us easily and try to find out the meaning as easy as possible by asking the teacher or looking on their cell phone. It is important to create a meaning as clear as possible preferably visual that they can easily mentally recall.</i>	

## Observation format 3

STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS LISTENING ACTIVITIES	
STAGE	TOPIC
<p>ENGAGE</p> <p>IMPACT OF USING REALIA</p>	<p><i>When realia was brought into the classroom, students found it interesting and from the beginning of the class the students' response was positive. Also it was important to notice how students from seeing the realia wanted to know about the name of the things in English for example: "¿Como se dice pera en Inglés?".</i></p>
<p>STUDY</p> <p>GIVING SPOKEN COMMANDS</p>	<p><i>After introducing new vocabulary we proceed to work on a pointing out activity in which we avoid giving them instructions in Spanish because the command was easy to model and most of students understood. Although they new what to do, they still asked what "point</i></p>

	<p><i>out” meant.</i></p> <p><i>Students ended up saying the word out loud as they listened to them repeatedly, it showed that even though they didn’t have the written part they still could identify the word when they listened to it.</i></p>
<p>ACTIVATE</p> <p>STUDENTS RESPONDING TO</p> <p>QUESTIONS USING NEW VOCABULARY</p>	<p><i>Since we already knew students had previous knowledge we included it on the questions along with the new vocabulary we taught them. It was important to model the actions and new vocabulary as we asked the question.</i></p> <p><i>In general the results were positive as we were looking for them to understand the spoken words instead of produce and that was evidenced when the questions were asked, students answered in Spanish or using body language applied in previous activities.</i></p>
<p><b>CONCLUSION:</b></p> <p><i>It was highly important to mix both the visual aid and the body language to convey the meaning. It is also important to avoid translation to mother tongue since when students were</i></p>	

*given the translation they did not make an effort to remember the word but immediately say the word in Spanish when someone else ask for the meaning.*

## Appendix C

### FIELD NOTES

#### **First week May 9th & 11th “Are you my mother” by P.D. Eastman**

- Students already know some of the vocabulary taught
- Students participate and follow instructions
- When teacher ask students they always reply
- Teacher use body language to explain new vocabulary and students follow, this help them to convey the meaning correctly
- Students want the Gym class to start, they constantly talk to each other about it, planning a soccer match
- Teacher test students listening comprehension teaching using commands, most of students reply correctly
- Students ask about meaning of words and phrases in English absolutely unrelated to the topic of the class like “¿como se dice “no me moleste” en Inglés?”

- Students like the characters of the story to be animals, also this increased their emotional response towards the story.

### **Second Week May 16th & 18th “Little Bear” by Else Holmelund Minarik**

- Students keep asking what are the flashcard for and what topic will they be seeing today.
- Students keep making animal noises imitating the animals they get to see from our images
- Teacher presents students the animals making the noise of each one
- The activities activated their previous knowledge and it was easier to add new animals vocabulary key for the story
- Students demonstrate they understood the story by making a comic of it. They are pretty good artists.
- Students participate actively in all the activities

### **Third Week May 23rd & 25th “The Very hungry caterpillar” By Eric Carle**

- Teacher reinforce students participation and answers using power words like “Excellent” “Very Good”
- Students knew most of the food vocabulary
- Teachers allow students help each other when working on the study stage.

- Some students were caught talking instead of doing the tasks assigned
- Students were divided in two teams that are competing on a “naughts and crosses” game.

Both teams got of the words right and students enjoyed also the competition.

#### **Fourth Week May 30th & June 1st “Green Eggs and Ham” by Dr. Seuss**

- Students remember the characters on the story by the movies
- Students keep repeating as the chunks of the story are repeated by the teacher.
- Students show surprise when they were told what is the meaning of the title of the book
- Teacher use flashcards while telling the story to show students the vocabulary learned in the story
- Teacher intervened because the classroom was getting noisy and disorganized.
- Some students were drawing the characters of the story from the images teacher sticked on the whiteboard.
- The chunks are a great way to let students not only to comprehend but also implicitly seems to motivate them to produce spoken English.
- Students laughed when one of their classmates tried to repeat the chunk of the story
- Students now understand the structure of the questions “Would you...?” and are able to answer questions regarding their own lives



**Fifth Week June 6th & 8th “Brown Bear Brown Bear, what do you see?” Bill Martin Jr. & Eric Carle**

- Students knew most of the color and animals vocabulary so teachers focused on working on the verb see and the questions structure “what do you see?” using flashcards.
- Since students knew most of the color vocabulary teachers added more colors to the students’ vocabulary.
- The different colors and animals mentioned activated students’ creativity and they started making up their own animals
- Students asked about other animals translation. For example: “¿Como se dice tiburón en Inglés?”
- From students participation and understanding we can evidence the students improvement from the first session to this one.
- Students want the Gym class to start.
- Students don’t seem to know these our last class with them and expect us to come next week.